

Kyodan

Kyodan News Letter

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No. 13

March 20, 1967

CONFESSION ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN JAPAN DURING THE WORLD WAR II.

The 25th Anniversary of the establishment of the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan) was celebrated during the 14th General Assembly of the Kyodan held in October, 1966 at Osaka, Japan. Now, we are faced with the serious task of building the Kyodan. In order to express our sense of responsibility which the Kyodan has toward Japan and the world we prayerfully take as our theme "OUR CHURCH-TOMORROW".

At this time we are reminded of the mistakes committed in the name of the Kyodan during World War II. Therefore, we seek the mercy of our Lord and the forgiveness of our fellow men.

At the time of the founding of the Kyodan the Japanese Government then under pressure asked that all religious bodies be brought together and that they cooperate with the national policy to bring the war to a victorious end.

Since the time that the Gospel was first presented in the early part of the Meiji Era, Japanese Christians had desired to establish one evangelical Church in Japan, by the merging of denominations. Therefore, they entered into this Union and the Kyodan was established taking advantage of an order of the government.

Concerning this founding and the continued existence of the Kyodan we recognize with deep fear and gratitude, that even in our failures and errors, the Providence of God, "The Lord of History", was at work.

The Church, as "the light of the world" and as "the salt of the earth" should not have aligned itself with the militaristic purpose of the government. Rather on the basis of our love for her, and by the standard of our Christian conscience, we should have more correctly criticized the policies of our mother land. However, we made a statement at home and abroad in the name of the Kyodan that we approved of and supported the war, and we prayed for victory.

Indeed, as our nation committed errors we, as a Church sinned with her. We neglected to perform our mission as a "watchman". Now, with deep pain in our heart we confess this sin, seeking the forgiveness of our Lord.

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More than 20 years have passed since the war, and we are filled with anxiety, for our mother land seems unable to decide the course that we should follow; we are concerned lest she move in an undesirable direction due to the many pressures of today's turbulent problems. At this moment so that the Kyodan may not make again the same mistakes and in order that the Kyodan can correctly accomplish its mission in Japan and the world we seek God's help and guidance. In this way we look forward to tomorrow with humble determination.

Masahisa Suzuki
Moderator
United Church of Christ
in Japan

Easter Sunday
March 26, 1967

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A WORD CONCERNING THE CONFESSION

The 14th General Assembly of the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan) was held in October, 1966 at the Osaka Girls School in Osaka. On the third day (Sunday) of the Conference the 25th Anniversary Commemorative Service was held. As we, of the Kyodan, look back on our 25 years history we have both a feeling of repentance and thankfulness and we pledge with all our strength to face our theme "OUR CHURCH-TOMORROW".

However, as we seriously looked at "OUR CHURCH-TOMORROW", we, at the same time, looked at our church yesterday and we felt that we must put our house in order.

This was clearly expressed in the Anniversary Sermon given by our Moderator Masahisa Suzuki. At this 14th General Assembly a motion was put before the Assembly that the Kyodan should make a confession of its responsibility in World War II. After much debate and discussion both in Plenary and group sessions the question was referred to the Standing Committee of the Kyodan. This matter was fully and freely discussed at the 2nd Standing Committee, the 2nd Executive Committee meetings, and at the 3rd Standing Committee session this motion was passed. A decision to publish this confession was made a part of the Kyodan record.

The date set for this publication of the Confession is Easter Sunday (March 26, 1967). The reason for this date being set was that in 1944 on Easter Sunday, the United Church published a statement called, "A Letter to the Christians in Greater East Asia". In this Letter the Kyodan approved the war, in the name of the Kyodan the policy of war was supported, and in the name of the Kyodan people gathered together to pray for victory. This present confession is not an attack on any one nor is it made in resentment but bearing the pain in our heart we confess to our friends around the world and especially in Asia and to our fellow-country men and from them we seek forgiveness.

WHY CONFESS "TODAY"?

Does it seem strange that 20 years after the war we are making this confession? In June, 1946, at the 3rd General Assembly of the Kyodan, a statement was made an after some corrections it was made public at an all Japan Christian Conference. However, this statement did not include words of Confession nor was it made public in the name of the Kyodan.

Immediately following World War II, during the period of reconstruction of our motherland, Japan entered again into fellowship with the countries of Asia and the Kyodan also began to recreate ties with the churches in Asia and in particular with the churches of Korea and Formosa, which had been under the rule of the militaristic government of Japan. So we feel that we must clearly confess our failures to these churches and seek again their forgiveness for our words and actions during World War II. We are filled with anxiety, for our motherland seems unable to decide the course that we should follow in the midst of the many turbulent problems in this present age.

CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KYODAN

In the process of debate and discussion concerning this Confession we are faced with the problem of how to interpret the "establishment of the Kyodan".

In the preamble of the Constitution of the Kyodan we read, "the Kyodan was established under the Providence of God and in unity with the Holy Spirit".

It is clearly written in the "history of the Kyodan" that "taking advantage of the enforcement of the Religious Bodies Law.....Church union was declared". God's Providence does not mean to simply settle for things as they are, but in spite of man's confusion and sin, God works in all things to accomplish His purposes.

Certainly, we must acknowledge that many people desired to enter the United Church by their own free will. However, the fact is that the Kyodan was established by an order of the government but in looking back at this fact we must say that "this order of the government was used to our advantage". In spite of our weaknesses and failures we must remember this was brought about by the Providence of God who is, "The Lord of History". In the light of this we have reached a decision to publish, A CONFESSON ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN JAPAN DURING WORLD WAR II.

